



UNITED STATES PATENT and TRADEMARK OFFICE

UNDER SECRETARY OF COMMERCE FOR INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY AND
DIRECTOR OF THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20231
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Mailed: NOV 23 2001

Paper Number 28

In re application of
Randell L. Mills.
Serial No. 09/008,947
Filed: January 20, 1998
For: FUEL CELL AND METHOD OF GENERATING ELECTRICITY IN A FUEL CELL

DECISION ON PETITION

This is a decision on the PETITION UNDER 37 CFR 1.181 TO WITHDRAW THE FINALITY OF THE OFFICE ACTION mailed July 5, 2001.

On September 1, 2000, a non-final office action was mailed to applicant (paper no. 18). The office action contained a rejection of all the claims under 35 USC 101 as lacking utility and 35 USC 112, first paragraph as lacking enablement.

A reply to the office action was filed by Applicant on March 1, 2001. In the reply, no amendments were made to the claims. Applicant presented arguments in an attempt to overcome the aforementioned rejections. Additionally, two declarations under Rule 132 were filed on June 8, 2001 and June 22, 2001.

On July 5, 2001 a final office action was mailed (paper no. 25). All of the previous grounds of rejection were maintained.

Petitioner has argued that the finality of the last office action is improper. Petitioner argues that the finality is premature due to the introduction of new grounds of rejection that were neither necessitated by amendment of the claims, nor based on information submitted in an information disclosure statement. Additionally, it is argued that a clear issue between applicant and examiner has not been developed.

DECISION

The non-final office action mailed September 1, 2000 contained rejections over claims 1, 2, 4-6 and 10-58 under 35 USC 101 and 35 USC 112, first paragraph. The office action presented arguments as to why the claims lack utility and enablement under the appropriate statute. Applicant's response to this office action, filed March 1, 2001 attempted to rebut the positions set forth in the September 1, 2000 office action. In the final office action mailed July 5, 2001, the examiner maintained the previous grounds of rejection of claims 1, 2, 4-6 and 10-58 and specifically referred back to the non-final office action for the reasoning behind the rejections (see final office action, page 2, lines 2-3 and 7). In addition, the examiner responded to Applicant's arguments in a separate section (see final office action - Attachment). In the attachment, the examiner addressed the arguments set forth by Applicant in the response filed March 1, 2001 and the Rule 132 declarations. As to the first issue of premature finality, the MPEP states the following:

706.07(a) Final Rejection, When Proper on Second Action

Under present practice, second or any subsequent actions on the merits shall be final, except where the examiner introduces a new ground of rejection that is neither necessitated by applicant's amendment of the claims nor based on information submitted in an information disclosure statement filed during the period set forth in 37 CFR 1.97(c) with the fee set forth in 37 CFR 1.17(p)

In the instant case, no new ground of rejection was applied by the examiner in the final office action. The 35 USC 101 and 112, first paragraph rejections were the same as those in the previous non-final action (in fact the examiner refers back to the previous office action for the reasoning in making the rejections). The arguments put forth by the examiner do not constitute a new ground of rejection in that they merely respond to arguments presented by applicant and do not change the basis for the rejections (i.e. the rejections are still based on lack of novelty and enablement as set forth in the previous office action).

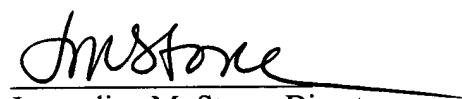
As to the second issue of premature finality, the MPEP states the following:

Before final rejection is in order a clear issue should be developed between the examiner and applicant.

In the present case, a clear issue has in fact been developed between the examiner and applicant. In the non-final action mailed September 1, 2000, the only grounds of rejection were the 35 USC 101 and 35 USC 112, first paragraph rejections mentioned above. The examiner set forth reasoning to support these rejections. Applicant then replied to the rejections and the positions of the examiner. The rejections were maintained in the final office action and the examiner answered the arguments filed by applicant relating to the issue of whether the claims were lacking in utility and enablement. The issues in the present application are clear - whether the claims lack utility and are enabled to one of ordinary skill in the art.

Accordingly, the examiner properly made the July 5, 2001 Office action final.

The Petition is **DENIED**.


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